

TURKEY HUNTING: WHAT NOT TO DO

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I've heard wild turkey hunting described as "pleasantly frustrating" and, after 18 years of practice, I'm inclined to agree. Sometimes you can do everything right only to get whipped by a wary old gobbler with an enhanced sense of self-preservation. Fair enough. However, a more likely scenario (especially early on in your turkey hunting career) is what one might politely refer to as "unforced error." You better believe I've been there.

Selected excerpts of the emotional carnage I've suffered could begin with the first turkey I ever shot at. After four days of rookie mistakes (it was, in fairness, my first hunt), I was finally in the right spot at the right time when two jakes pitched out of a tree and walked right up to my decoy. Problem was I was in a prone position with the shotgun under my armpit. They approached so quickly I didn't dare make the movement necessary to shoulder the gun so I scrunched my head down to aim and touched off at a range of 10 feet. KA-BOOM!!! Both birds launched straight up with a squawk and were gone. How could I miss? After lying there with my face in the dirt for a few minutes doing penance, I determined that I'd (1) achieved an erroneous sight picture because the gun wasn't properly mounted and, (2) aimed at the top of the turkey's head instead of midway down the neck. Of course, having a pattern of about 2 inches at that distance probably didn't help.

Not all my foul-ups got as far as the shooting part. A couple years later found me atop a pretty New Mexico ridge on a crisp April morning with a fired-up gobbler tending his harem of hens on a bench below me down an old logging road. Yelping would draw a gobbler every time but he wasn't about to leave the company of his ladies. Finally, secure in the knowledge I was the only hunter in the area, I tried the gobbler tube. "Gobble-obble-obble," I said. "GOBBLE-OBBLE-OBBLE!!!" He roared back his challenge and up the road he came. Paranoid still about getting busted for movement, I crouched behind a slash pile poised to shoot as soon as the tom cleared my position. He must have come right up to my hiding spot

because his last gobble all but lifted me off the ground. Then all was silent. After five or ten minutes, I finally let myself peek around the slash pile. I never saw the gobbler but I'll bet he saw my breath condensing in the chill morning air from behind that slash pile, telling him there was a warm-blooded critter waiting to pounce. Doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure that out...just a turkey.

Over the next few years I decided it helped to see the gobbler coming and be in a good position to take a well-aimed shot. 'Course that didn't always stop me from making the most basic mistake of all. Just a few years ago, hunting highly-pressured birds in Wisconsin, I set up in a nice oak grove against a big tree, positioned my decoy and waited, determined to call sparingly and let at least 15 minutes pass before making the first sound. Then, from behind me, I heard, "f-f-f-t...vur-r-r-r-mf." It was the unmistakable sound of a gobbler drumming that intoxicating noise you can only hear when he's strutting very, very close. Fool that I am I tried to turn quickly to get a shot. I never even saw him he was gone so fast. And that, my friends, brings us to the three most important rules of turkey hunting...don't move, don't move and don't move.



Even a blind hog finds an acorn sometimes!